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Psychological Health and the Military Family

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By *Kirsten Woodward, LCSW, BUMED Director Family Programs Division*

The other day I was having a discussion with some colleagues, both within the Navy and in the academic community about some of the aspects of care we provide. Some of my colleagues said they are mental health providers and some stated they are behavioral health providers, but none mentioned the fact they are psychological health providers. My colleagues and I represent the gamut of providers; psychiatry, psychology and social work. We all have a passion for taking care of our patients. We want to prevent and mitigate any issues that might arise from combat and operational stress, both for service members and for their families.

When I began to explain what was meant by psychological health – the bio-psycho-social-spiritual elements necessary for healthy functioning of mind and

body, individually and within the family as a whole – all of my colleagues agreed that they too use this framework. We then began to share examples – both from the individual provider perspective and also from a leadership perspective, such as Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen’s “Total Force Fitness” campaign, which uses the bio-psycho-social-spiritual model as a framework.

The bio-psycho-social-spiritual elements are also infused in a program for families called Project Families Over Coming Under Stress (FOCUS). The program is based on over 20 years of evidence from families that have undergone severe stress and the interventions that address them. In FOCUS, families can mitigate their stress and increase their psychological health through many options – all of which carry the bio-psycho-social-spiritual elements. The program has three tiers – outreach and education; skill building workshops and psychoeducational groups and individual family resilience training. FOCUS staff work closely with their colleagues in the community – chaplains, medical treatment facility providers, Fleet and Family Services and Marine Corps Community Services – to holistically address the bio-psycho-social-spiritual needs of families in order to increase psychological health.

FOCUS has been able to show that families who have gone through the program are statistically significantly improved in their overall functioning and psychological health.

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